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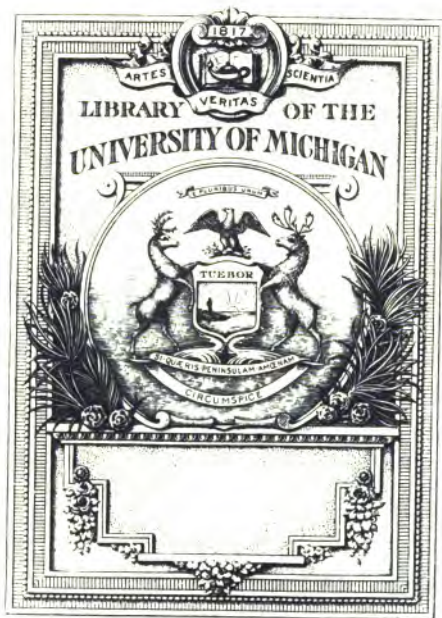
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Bohemia's claim to independence



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BOHEMIA'S CLAIM TO INDEPENDENCE

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY
CHARLES PERGLER, LL. B.,
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
UNITED STATES,
ON FEBRUARY 25th, 1916.



1916

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SOME AMERICAN AND ENGLISH BOOKS ON BOHEMIA.

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On December 6th, 1915, representative Meyer London, of New York, introduced in the House of Representatives a joint resolution, calling upon the President of the United States to offer mediation to the belligerents in Europe, and declaring it to be the judgment of the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States that a durable peace can be established if certain principles enumerated in the resolution shall be made the basis of discussion in a congress of neutral nations.

One of the principles so specified in the resolution is the liberation of oppressed nationalities.

Hearings were had before the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives of the United States on the 24th and 25th of February, 1916, at Washington, and the Bohemian Alliance of America was represented at such hearings by its president, Dr. L. J. Fisher, Mr. Frank Filip, Mr. J. J. Král, and Charles Pergler.

Speaking to that part of the resolution demanding the liberation of oppressed nationalities, Mr. Charles Pergler delivered the address appearing on the following pages.

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**GENTLEMEN OF THE COMMITTEE
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES:**

In dealing with the question of the liberation of oppressed nationalities, and in preparing to take the initiative to achieve their liberation, the Congress of the United States is following the best American traditions and precedents.

In 1849, while the Hungarian Revolution was still in progress, Mr. Clayton sent an emissary, Dudley A. Mann, with instructions to recognize the Hungarian republic in case it appeared to be firmly established. The Austrian government protested, and it became the lot of Daniel Webster to respond, and in December, 1850, this great American wrote a spirited reply, denying that the visit was an unfriendly act, and asserting the right of the American people to sympathize with the efforts of any nation to acquire liberty. "Certainly the United States may be pardoned", said Daniel Webster, "even by those who profess adherence to the principles of absolute governments, if they entertain an

ardent affection for its popular forms of political organization which have so rapidly advanced their own prosperity, their happiness, and enabled them in so short a period to bring their country, and the hemisphere to which it belongs, to the notice and respectful regard, not to say the admiration, of the civilized world."

There is no question that in the Spanish American War one of the main motives, actuating the American people in their conduct, was the desire to see Cuba free and independent.

The right of any nation to self-government and independence is not and cannot be a debatable question. It would be idle, and a waste of time and words, to endeavor to prove that this or that nationality is entitled to freedom and independence. This is one of the self-evident truths from the force of which debate or discussion would merely detract. This is especially true of a nation concerning which President Woodrow Wilson says in one of his works: "No lapse of time, no defeat of hopes, seems sufficient to reconcile the Czechs of Bohemia to incorporation with Austria; pride of race and the memories of a notable and distinguished history keep them always at odds with the Germans within their gates and with the government set over their heads. They desire at least the same

degree of autonomy that has been granted to Hungary." The State, by Woodrow Wilson, Section 589, Edition of 1889, page 338.

The history of the Czech nationality is one of an unparalleled martyrdom. With the exception of the Poles, and at present of the Armenians, it is quite doubtful whether there is any other nation in the world that has ever been subjected to the persecution which followed the unfortunate result of the battle of White Mountain in 1620.

During the fifteenth century, the Czechs fought for the freedom of conscience against the whole of Europe. But following this glorious period came exhaustion, and after the battle of White Mountain in 1620 the Bohemians lost their independence. After this battle, twenty-seven leaders of the Bohemian Rebellion against Ferdinand the Second were executed; many of them tortured and thirty-six thousand families forced to leave their native land, and their property confiscated. Today Bohemians pay more than four hundred million crowns yearly by way of taxes to the Austrian government in Vienna; but all this money stays in Vienna, and is being used for the support of the Austrian Alp lands that are financially passive, while the needs of Bohemia are being neglected.

The ruthless persecution following the battle of White Mountain almost wiped out the Czechs as a distinct national individuality. A policy of Germanization was followed unmercifully, even by so liberal an Emperor as Joseph Second, whose ambition it was to erect a strong and ethnically unified Austria against the ambitions of such Prussian Kings as Frederick the Great. Indeed, toward the end of the eighteenth century, the Czech nation was looked upon as dead.

Yet the vitality of the nation was such that it arose from its grave. This modern miracle is largely a triumph of democracy, because it was the vitality of the plain people, as Lincoln always called them, of the peasants especially, that withstood all the assaults of the Germanizing elements. Beginning with the nineteenth century, Czech men of letters begin to appear, and the revolutionary year of 1848 brings a political renaissance.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the nation reached a cultural level surpassing that of any other nationality in Austria. In literature and arts it is second to no nation of its numerical strength; economically it has been making rapid strides forward, being second only to the Austrian Germans, while in cultural re-

spects it stands at the head of all Austrian nationalities. The Czechs have not quite four per cent of persons who can neither read nor write, while the Germans of Austria have six per cent, and the Magyars forty per cent.

With all this high degree of development, it still cannot be said that the existence of the Czechs as a nationality is secure. The Austrian constitution declares all nationalities to be equal, but in practice this provision means very little. Eleven million Germans in Austria have five universities, while ten million Czechs, including Slovaks, have but one university; the provisions for other school facilities are no better. This leads to the Germanization of thousands of Bohemian children; the only means of defense the Czechs have against this is an organization which maintains schools in many places for Bohemian children from funds raised by contributions of patriotic Czechs.

The Slovaks of Hungary, who now demand that they be united in an independent state with their Czech brethren, have suffered and suffer now even worse under the Magyar regime.

Just before the outbreak of the present war, the last measure of Bohemian autonomy was destroyed by the dissolution of the so-called council of the Kingdom, and by the creation of

a special Imperial commission to govern Bohemia. This act was illegal and unconstitutional. The destruction of Bohemian independence after the battle of White Mountain was an equally illegal act, and the Bohemians never acquiesced in it. It appears therefore that in demanding independence Bohemians can base their demands not only upon the right of any nation to self-government, but also upon laws and constitutions which have never been repealed or abrogated with the consent of the Bohemian people.

It is the devout desire of all rightminded men that the present terrible European conflagration be followed by a permanent and durable peace. But the peace following this war cannot be durable and cannot be permanent if ancient injustices are perpetuated. It is in the interest of all neutral powers that the last vestige of injustice be removed in the future peace conference. In adopting a resolution demanding the discussion by neutral powers of liberation of oppressed nationalities, the congress of the United States can place itself not only upon the high moral ground of justice and righteousness, but also can do so as a matter of enlightened American self-interest.

One of the main causes of the present war was the mal-adjustment of Balkan affairs, and the failure to solve the Balkan national question.

As long as a single nation anywhere remains under the heel of the conqueror, just so long the peace of the world is insecure. In one of his recent speeches, the President of the United States spoke of the dangers infinite and constant which surround this country. The days of isolation and self-sufficiency of any country are gone. A conflagration started in the Balkans may cause a war that would spread throughout the world. The neutral powers have a right to protect themselves against such danger. If our neighbor's house does not answer the requirements of the fire ordinance, we have the right to demand that he conform to such requirements so that at some future time our own house may not be set afire. The analogy holds true today in international relations.

During the Kossuth visit to this country, more than fifty years ago, Daniel Webster concluded one of his most remarkable orations with the following sentiment: "Hungarian independence, Hungarian control of her own destinies, and Hungary as a distinct nationality among the nations of Europe." It is regrettable that the Magyars, since gaining complete autonomy for themselves, themselves turned oppressors of Slav nationalities, but this does not change the applicability of the sentiment expressed by Daniel Webster, and does not mean the same

attitude as against oppressed nationalities should not be taken by American statesmen. Why not Bohemian independence; Bohemian control of her own destinies, and Bohemia as a distinct nationality among the nations of Europe?



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